

metro

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Tuesday, December 18, 2018 metro.us | t: MetroBOS | f: MetroBoston



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THE CHAMPS ARE BACK



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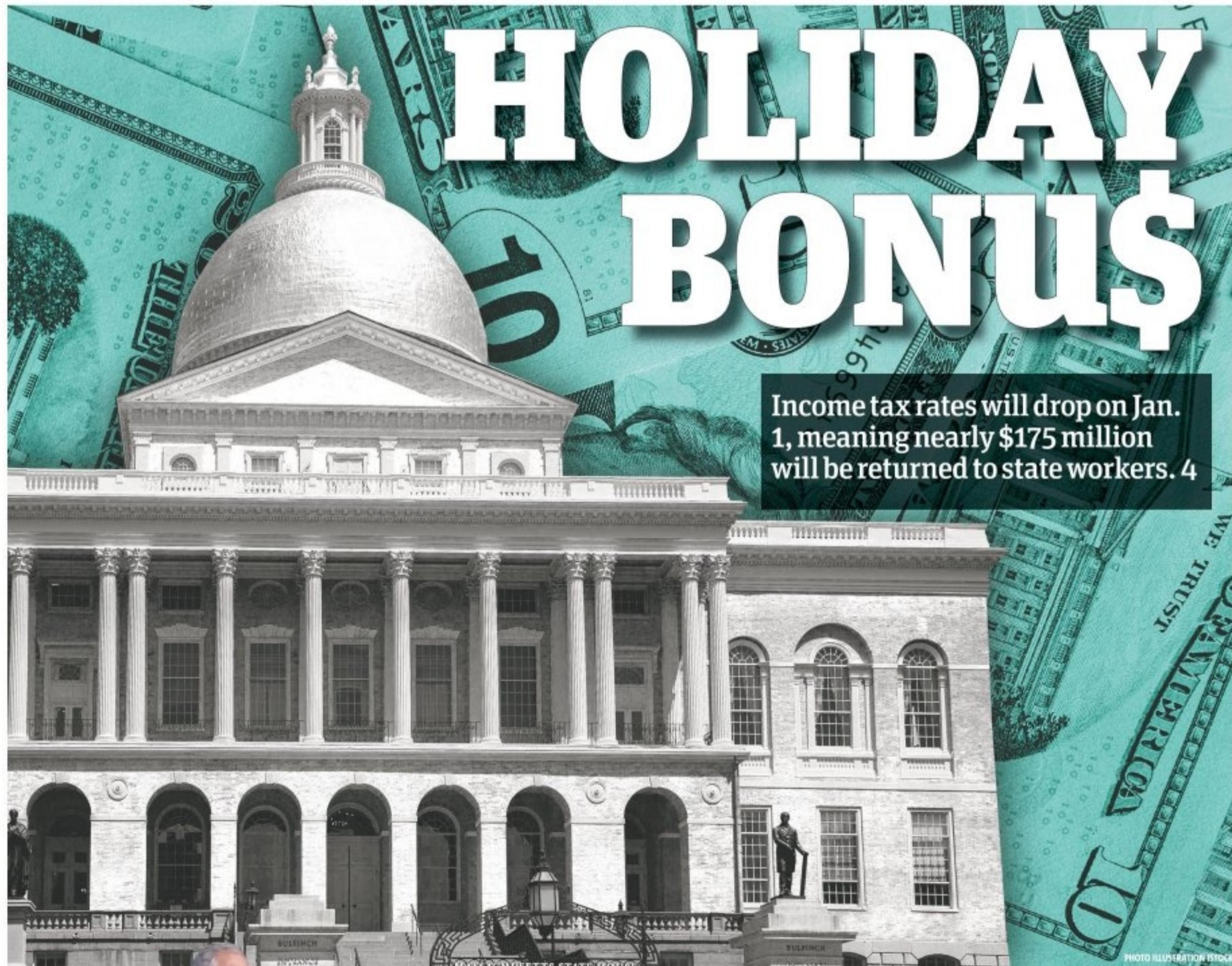


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6 THINGS TO KNOW



KRISTIN TOUSSAINT, REPORTER

Your eyes may glaze over at any income-tax news, but it's important stuff, and the latest change will actually let you keep more of the money you make. The Massachusetts income tax is falling from 5.1 percent to 5.05 percent in the new year, and though that may not seem like a lot, it'll account for a \$175 million total income tax break for Massachusetts workers. You read that right. Plus, this marks the lowest income tax rate for the Bay State in decades. Happy New Year! Read more about what that actually means for residents and the state itself inside and at metroboston.us.

WELCOME TO METRO BOSTON

FLYNN'S EX-BIZ PARTNER SECRET TURKEY LOBBYIST

I An ex-business partner of former U.S. national security adviser Michael Flynn and a businessman with ties to Turkish government officials have been charged with undisclosed lobbying aimed at the extradition of a Muslim cleric living in the United States. Flynn's former partner, Bijan Rafiekian, was indicted on two criminal counts, including conspiracy to act as an agent of a foreign government, according to a grand jury indictment unsealed on Monday in the Eastern District of Virginia. Ekim Alptekin, a

Turkish-Dutch businessman, was charged for allegedly plotting with Turkish officials to cause the extradition of Turkish Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen and for lying to the FBI about his efforts, among six total counts. The charges underscored the broadening impact of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, which is focused on possible collusion between Russia and President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign but which has led to at least four spinoff probes including the case against Alptekin and Rafiekian.

RUSSIA USED SOCIAL MEDIA FOR US MEDDLING

2 Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election on social media was more widespread than previously thought and included attempts to divide Americans by race and extreme ideology, said reports by private experts released on Monday by U.S. senators from both parties. The Russian government's Internet Research Agency, based in St. Petersburg, Russia, tried to manipulate U.S. politics, said the reports, one by social media analysts New Knowledge and the other by an Oxford University team working with analytical firm Graphika. The twin reports largely



EMPIRE STATE BUILDING CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF 'THE SIMPSONS'

3 Bart, Homer, Lisa, Marge and Maggie Simpson visit the Empire State Building to celebrate the 30th anniversary of "The Simpsons" on Monday.

GOLDMAN FIRES BACK AFTER MALAYSIA CHARGES

4 Malaysia on Monday filed criminal charges against Goldman Sachs Group Inc. related to its dealings with the sovereign wealth fund 1MDB, and Goldman Sachs fired back that the previous Malaysian government had lied to the bank. Malaysia authorities charged the bank and two former Goldman employees in connection with an investigation into suspected corruption and money laundering related to the scandal. Attorney General Tommy Thomas said in a statement that it will seek jail terms as well as billions in fines from Goldman Sachs and four other individuals

who allegedly diverted about \$2.7 billion from 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB). This is the first time Goldman Sachs, which has consistently denied wrongdoing, has faced criminal charges in the 1MDB scandal. "Certain members of the former Malaysian government and 1MDB lied to Goldman Sachs, outside counsel and others about the use of proceeds from these transactions," Goldman spokesman Michael DuVally said in a statement. DuVally said that the bank was not afforded the chance to be heard prior to the filing of the charges and will contest the allegations.

'JUSTICE' NAMED WEBSTER'S 2018 WORD OF THE YEAR

5 "Justice" is what most people sought on Merriam-Webster, among the world's most popular dictionaries, as the U.S. publisher named that principle of being fair as the Word of the Year for 2018. Users looked up the word 74 percent more often than in 2017, said spokeswoman Meghan Lunghi for the website, which claims to be "America's most trusted dictionary." The surge was prompted by specific uses of the word such as "obstruction of justice," after U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted in August that Attorney General Jeff Sessions should stop Special Counsel

Robert Mueller's investigation into Russia's role in the 2016 election, the company said in a statement. "It's often familiar words for abstract concepts that are among the most looked-up words," said Emily Brewster, associate editor for Merriam-Webster, in the statement. "When common words like justice are used in contexts that are very specific, technical, or legal, people look them up in the dictionary for the detail and nuance that a definition can provide." "Justice" joined Dictionary.com's "misinformation" and the Oxford English Dictionary's "toxic" as top words of the year.

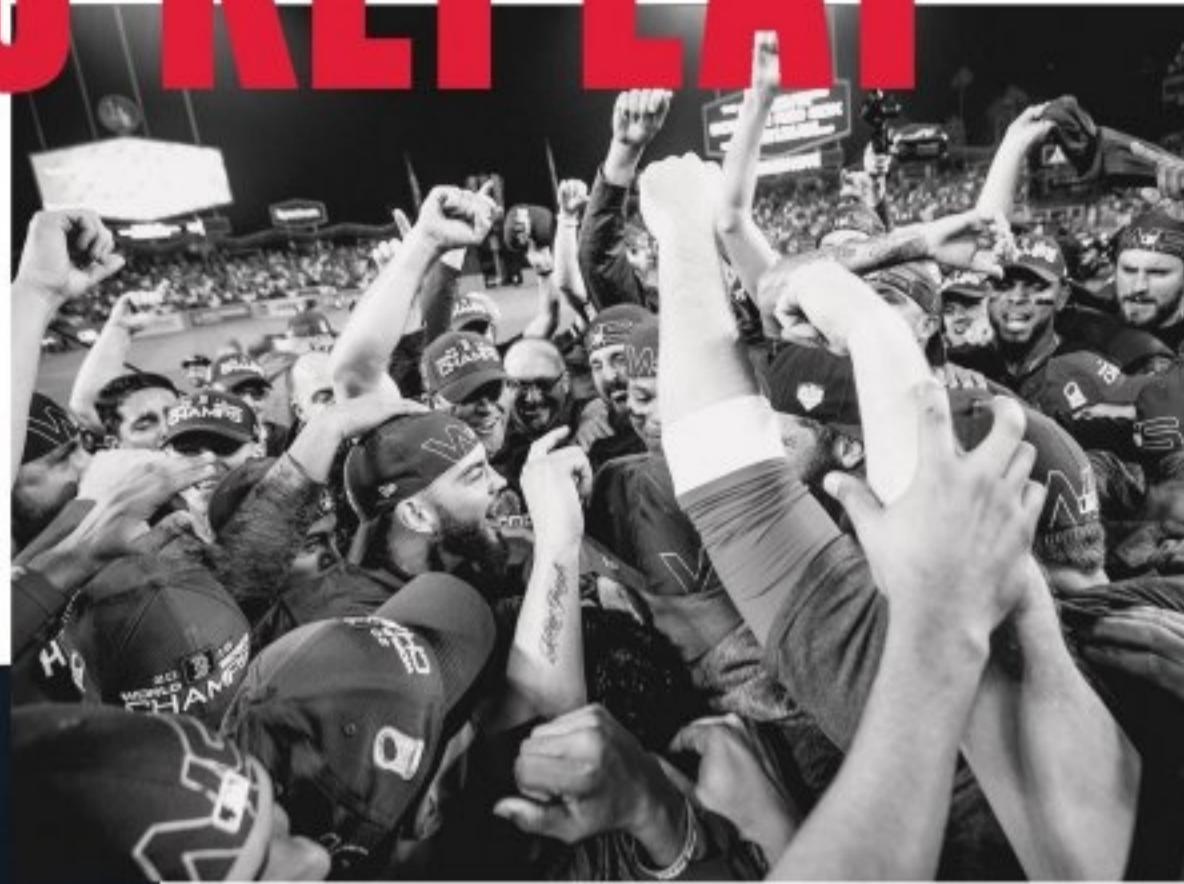
STATS

GOV'T SHUTDOWN

The federal government could face a partial shutdown in five days, due to an ongoing standoff over funding for the border wall. When asked if the president was willing to shut the government down if he doesn't get border wall funding, White House senior adviser Stephen Miller said, "If it comes to it, absolutely. This is a very fundamental issue." Do you think there will or will not be a government shutdown in five days?



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Jan. 1 income tax cut worth \$175M to state workers

The Massachusetts income tax is falling from 5.1 percent to 5.05 percent in the new year.

While there's growing talk of a possible recession, Massachusetts workers are about to receive a \$175 million income tax break, and there's now a possibility that the 5 percent income tax rate that voters approved in 2000 will actually happen in 2020.

As the weekend got underway Friday, the Baker administration quietly announced that all of the necessary economic triggers had been hit and the income tax will fall from 5.1 percent to 5.05 percent on Jan. 1, 2019.

In August, Revenue Commissioner Christopher Harding certified that fiscal 2018 revenues had



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easily outpaced the state's 2.5 percent trigger, and tax revenue growth in four consecutive three-month periods, the most recent one ending this month, was positive enough to force the rate reduction.

The tax relief means \$84 million less for the state budget over the last half of fiscal 2019, and its

impact over a full fiscal year is \$175 million.

While the slight rate cut may not make a huge difference in take-home pay for workers, its \$175 million annualized value exceeds the total \$160 million increase in aid to local public schools this fiscal year and nearly equals the \$200 million in this year's

budget to combat the opioid and heroin epidemic.

In a press release issued at 6 p.m. Friday, Gov. Charlie Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito applauded the tax rate reduction.

"A strong economy and careful management of the commonwealth's finances have created the conditions for Mas-

sachusetts taxpayers to get a much-deserved break," said Baker. "We are pleased that next year we will see taxpayers be able to keep more of their hard-earned money."

Said Polito, "Next year the income tax rate will be the lowest it has been in decades, which will provide welcome relief to workers across the commonwealth. Massachusetts taxpayers deserve the boost that this rate reduction will deliver."

Michael Heffernan, Baker's budget chief, called the reduction "a nice break for taxpayers."

In his first bid for governor in 2010, Baker made reducing the income, sales and corporate tax rates to 5 percent a central theme of his campaign. After losing that year to Gov. Deval Patrick, Baker placed less emphasis on tax relief in his two successful cam-

paigns for governor in 2014 and this year.

Income tax rate reductions did not occur in 2013 or 2017, but the former 5.3 percent rate fell in 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

In 2002, with Rep. John Rogers serving as House Ways and Means chairman, the legislature pushed through a \$1.1 billion tax bill over former Gov. Jane Swift's veto. That law froze at 5.3 percent the income tax rate, which voters in 2000 had ordered to be cut to 5 percent.

The 2002 tax law also cut the personal exemption from \$4,400 to \$3,300 for individuals and \$8,800 to \$6,600 for couples. Those exemptions were restored to their previous levels in the ensuing years, and triggers have slowly ticked the income tax rate back closer to 5 percent, but not quite there yet.

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CBS denies former CEO Leslie Moonves \$120M severance

The disgraced network chief denies any wrongdoing; legal battle likely.

CBS Corp. said on Monday it will not pay Leslie Moonves a \$120 million severance package as it girds for a likely legal battle with its former chief executive who has been accused of sexual harassment and assault that allegedly took place before and after he joined the company.

The decision to deprive Moonves of his severance and terminate his employment for cause follows a board of directors review of the findings of an investiga-

tion into Moonves' behavior and the CBS culture conducted by two law firms, Debevoise & Plimpton and Covington & Burling, hired by CBS.

"We have determined that there are grounds to terminate for cause, including his willful and material misfeasance, violation of company policies and breach of his employment contract, as well as his willful failure to cooperate fully with the company's investigation," CBS's board of directors said in a statement that did not disclose details of the investigation.

A draft report of the investigation was leaked to the New York Times this month. It

accused Moonves of destroying evidence and seeking to mollify accusers with promises of jobs at CBS.

The report also included more accusations that Moonves advanced the careers of women who had sex with him and more accusers beyond the 12 disclosed in two New Yorker investigations that led to Moonves' forced resignation in September.

Moonves has denied any wrongdoing and has described his sexual encounters as consensual. His attorney, Andrew Levander, did not immediately return a call for comment.

The CBS board also

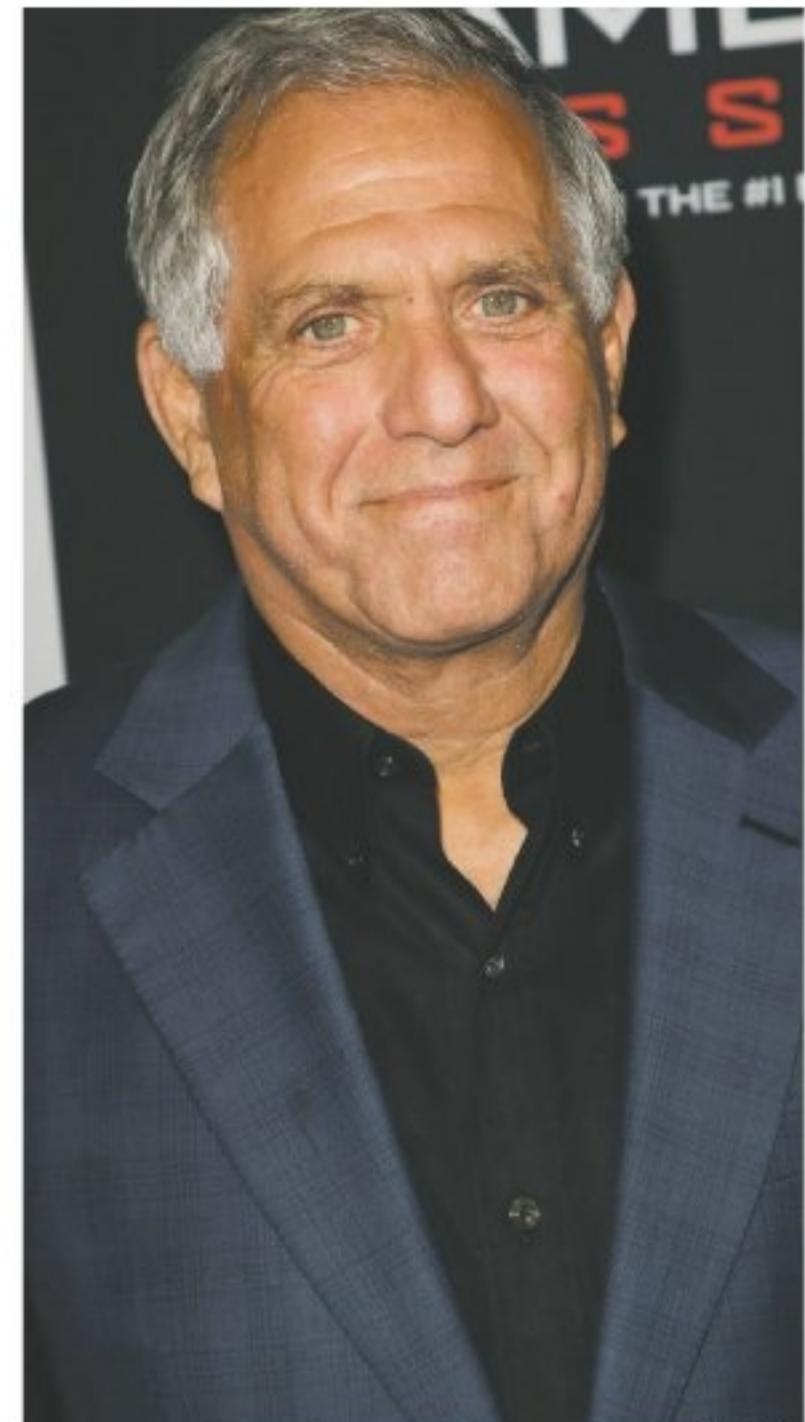
said investigators found that harassment and retaliation were not pervasive at CBS but found that its policies and practices failed to prevent past incidents.

Investigators did find that the company failed to hold "high performers" accountable for their conduct, the board said.

The board said it has retained outside advisers to fix its human resources problems.

Last week, CBS named 18 recipients of a \$20 million donation drawn from Moonves's severance to support eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace.

REUTERS



GETTY IMAGES

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The end of the student loan grace period means an end to the heady days of payment-free living. Now, every month, you'll part with a chunk of money that perhaps you'd rather spend on something — anything — else.

You can't change the fact that you have student loans. But you can make the next 10 years easier, and perhaps even part with those loans sooner. Here's how.

Pick a timeline

Most student loans are

Read this before making your first student loan payment

federal loans, and the government places borrowers on a 10-year repayment schedule unless they choose a different one.

If 10 years sounds like too long, you can pay off student loans early. It's a worthwhile goal if you have at least a month of expenses saved, if you're also saving for retirement, and if you don't have credit card debt, which is generally more expensive than student debt.

Consider refinancing student loans once you have solid income from full-time work. A private lender will pay off your current loans — both federal or private — and issue you a new one at an interest rate tied to your financial history. You'll save money over time if you receive a lower interest rate, but you'll need



a credit score in the high 600s or above to qualify without a co-signer.

For some, though, 10 years is too short, and monthly loan payments are too high. Sign up for income-driven repayment, which caps payments at 10 percent to 15 percent of your income and, if your income is low enough, can cut them all

the way to \$0. As interest adds up, that means your balance may grow, rather than shrink. But if you make payments under these plans for 20 to 25 years, the remaining balance is forgiven.

Error-proof your payments

No matter which repayment term you choose,

one rule is sacred: Set up autopay.

This lets your lender or student loan servicer debit the monthly payment from your checking account automatically. You won't forget to make a payment, and you'll also generally receive a quarter-point interest rate discount. Ensure there's enough money in your checking account to avoid an overdraft.

Some servicers will let you deduct more than you're required to pay when you make automatic payments, which will get rid of loans faster.

If you're extra-motivated — and trust yourself to stick to a schedule — you could make biweekly payments manually online. By paying half the amount you owe every two weeks, you'll end up making 13 full payments by the end of the year.

rather than 12. Or you can make a full extra payment every two weeks and conquer your loans in half the time.

Commit early to loan forgiveness

Getting your student loans forgiven could be a dream that actually comes true, as long as you pay close attention to the rules of the program you're interested in.

It's smart for public service employees in particular to explore their options. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program dissolves your federal loan balance after 120 on-time loan payments, as long as you work for an eligible employer. Teachers, nurses, doctors and Perkins loan borrowers have additional federal student loan forgiveness options.

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Things you need to know about Salem's Alternative Therapies Group



Recreational marijuana customers can now go to Alternative Therapies Group. ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

If the ghosts, goblins and ghouls of Salem weren't already freaking you out, now there's another way to get paranoid in Witch City. Alternative Therapies Group, the third dispensary to offer recreational marijuana in Massachusetts, opened its doors to the public Saturday, reportedly seeing over 80 people waiting in line as its first customers. It's the first recreational dispensary to open in the Greater Boston area, and, if you're as excited as we are, here's some tips to making your first visit go as smoothly as possible.

How to set up an appointment

Eager to avoid the long

lines that accompanied openings at the state's other two recreational dispensaries, ATG's recreational customers will first need to secure an appointment through the store's website. At the time of publication, the store was fully booked and no longer accepting new appointments, though this should change as the immediate surge for demand dies down.

Once you've scheduled a time, make sure you bring along a print-out of your confirmation email, as well as a government-issued ID demonstrating you're over 21 years old. Medical patients, on the other hand, face no such restrictions, and can visit the dispensary without

an appointment on an as-needed basis.

How to get there

ATG is the first recreational dispensary in Massachusetts accessible by T — about a 20-minute walk from the Salem commuter rail stop. The store also offers free shuttle service to and from the station, about a five-minute drive each way.

There is also a designated parking area along Harmony Grove Road, as well as another parking facility at 297 Bridge St. Customers can take a free shuttle from the Bridge Street parking location, too.

The website warns that customers "should expect to be ticketed

or towed" if they park anywhere other than the designated areas. Registered medical patients, as well as those with a handicap plate, may park at the facility's on-site parking lot.



What's on the menu?

So, you have your appointment, have parked in a designated spot and made your way through the door. What kinds of goodies can you expect to get your hands on?

The shop touts four strains of flower on its website: Catatonic, a high-CBD hybrid strain for those seeking to treat pain or other ailments without many intoxicating effects; Captain's Cake, a sweet-tasting indica; Star Pupil, an indica-dominant hybrid good for relaxation and stomach/muscle problems; and one-gram pre-rolls of White Widow, a citrusy hybrid with balanced intoxicating effects.

All tout relatively high levels of cannabinoids (20 to 26 percent).

Prices range from \$47 for 3.5 grams to \$350 for a full ounce (not including taxes). Pre-rolls cost \$15.

The shop also offers a range of concentrates, oils and extracts,

including half-gram and full-gram cartridges that range from \$60 to \$100. You can also score a gram of hybrid kief for \$25 — not bad!

While the menu does contain a few edibles and tinctures, due to the state's strange regulations, these are only available to medical customers for now.

Are they hiring?

Yes! ATG lists a few openings at their location on their website, including roles for a patient provisioning specialist, cultivation specialist and assistant manager.

What are the hours?

Alternative Therapies Group is located at 50 Grove St. in Salem, open daily from 9 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. For more information, you can call the dispensary at 978-594-5728 or visit its website at atgma.org.

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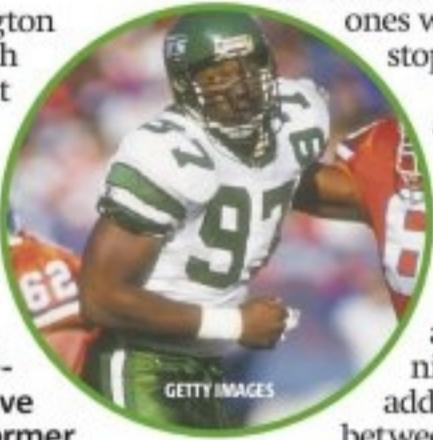
After 11 seasons in the NFL, Marvin Washington retired in 1999, but not before suffering physical injuries that forced him to use opiates as his only treatment option.

Today, Washington is one of the main athlete spokespersons in favor of medical cannabis, especially the use of cannabinoids as a neuro-protective — a measure to reduce the effects of concussions suffered by many former players as a result of blows to the head — as well as the establishment of a program for the protection of current players. The NFL's ambassador for Athletes for Care also advocates medical cannabis as a way to alleviate the health epidemic that

is plaguing the United States: opioid abuse and addiction.

Washington chatted with Metro about the issue.

On those issues of opioid addiction and abuse, what consequences have you seen former players suffer from?
I've seen it with former players, people with whom I played, who became addicted to opioids. People who have not played in decades, since the early nineties, and when you talk to them, they still take pills for pain and stuff. It's ab-



solutely crazy. Many can stop, but others cannot.

I am one of the lucky ones who could stop.

There are studies that show that when medical cannabis is taken to a community, opioid addiction falls between 15 and 25 percent. So this is something we must achieve, because this can help not only former athletes and former football players, it can help, above all, this nation to get its hands off this opioid addiction epidemic.

What is your message to people who still have doubts about the use of medicinal cannabis?

I would say to them that there is a natural option. If you have a broken leg or something, of course you're going to use opioids, but you should not be using them for two, three months later, three years later. Look into natural options. Do some research on this plant and see if it can help you.

I'm not saying that this plant is the cure, but I know it can help a myriad of diseases and indications, so do the research. What do you have to lose? It's something our ancestors used to medicate themselves with, so why not look back? **DAVID CORDERO MERCADO**

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Mark Hogancamp (Steve Carell) and his supportive friend Roberta (Merritt Wever) with the dolls of Mark's fictional town in "Welcome to Marwen." ED ARAQUEL/UNIVERSAL PICTURES



How true is 'Welcome to Marwen'?

Director Robert Zemeckis talks us through it.



GREGORY WAKEMAN

Gregory.Wakeman@metro.us

It didn't take long for Robert Zemeckis to realize that the 2010 documentary "Marwencol" had all the ingredients for a feature-film adaptation. "I was channel-surfing one night and it was playing on PBS," Zemeckis tells Metro. "After about 15 minutes, I started to think there was the germ of an idea that could be expanded into an interesting and compelling feature film."

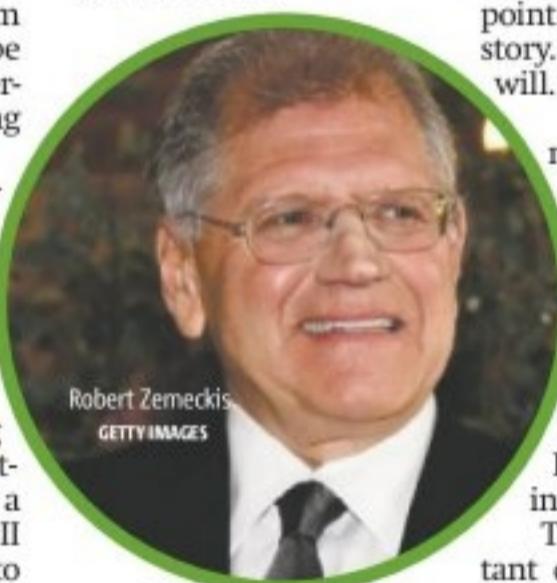
The story that Zemeckis found so "hopeful" was that of Mark Hogancamp, who, after being violently assaulted and left for dead by five men just for admitting to being a crossdresser, constructed and photographed a miniature World War II village in an attempt to regain his memory.

"It is about the triumph of the human spirit," explains Zemeckis. "Even more than that I was fascinated by the idea that it spoke to the healing power of art. That it was vital that this guy invented a new art form because he couldn't draw anymore."

"He used that new art form of photography to create this world that allowed him to process this incredibly tragic thing

that happened to him. I thought that was really magnificent."

When "Welcome to Marwen" dives into the doll world that Mark has created, we see animated, doll-like versions of Steve Carell, who plays Hogancamp, as well as Leslie Mann's Nicole, Merritt Wever's Roberta, Janelle Monae's GI Julie, Eiza Gonzalez's Caralala, and Gwendoline Christie's Anna, each of whom perform the heroic actions that Mark envisions, which helps him deal with his PTSD.



Robert Zemeckis

GETTY IMAGES

In order for "Welcome to Marwen" to work, Zemeckis knew it was essential that these animated sequences blend perfectly with the real-world scenes, especially when it came to tone.

"You don't want it to be sentimental or melodramatic. It is a balance that you have to do in most stories that you tell."

"The key to it is dealing honestly with things that are very much real

and not sugarcoating them or making them a fairy-tale story. I could do that in the doll world, but not in the real world with Mark."

But while Zemeckis was so inspired by Mark Hogancamp's story and art that he immediately set out to write and direct "Welcome to Marwen," he only used the real events as a springboard rather than strictly adhering to the truth.

"It is not another documentary," says Zemeckis. "But it certainly uses the real events as big bullet-point events in his life story. As an outline, if you will. As a springboard."

"But most of the movie is more fictionalized, rather than it being another document again of what happened to him. Because in the documentary, he tells us the story. It's not dramatized in any way."

There's one important distinction between "Marwencol" and "Welcome to Marwen," insists Zemeckis.

"The key difference between the two is, I saw that between these photographs he took were these elaborate stories in the doll world that were only in his mind's eye. I thought that should be where most of the movie takes place, in the doll world."

"Welcome to Marwen" opens in theaters Dec. 21.

No, Ellen DeGeneres isn't leaving her talk show to become more 'Relatable'

The comedian really wants everyone to know that she's not nice all the time.

 ANDREW HUSBAND
letters@metro.us

Last week, Ellen DeGeneres made waves on social media when a New York Times profile hinted that she was considering leaving her daytime talk show. The comedian, whose new Netflix special "Relatable" debuts on Tuesday, recently extended her contract to 2020. However, as the 60-year-old entertainer notes in the interview, she almost didn't because of her brother, who has been "making the case that in the age of Trump, the country needs her positive, unifying voice on television every day."

"She gets mad when my brother tells me I can't stop," DeGeneres says of her wife, the actress Portia de Rossi. In response, the latter says that Ellen is "such a brilliant actress and stand-up that it doesn't have to be this talk show for her creativity" since "there are other things she could tackle." In other words, why should the comic, who hasn't released a comedy special in 15 years, relegate herself to daytime television only?

The profile notwithstanding, DeGeneres opens up about her concerns with continuing the talk show in "Relatable." In fact, it serves as the crux for the special's title, which comes from a friend who asked the comic if she would even do stand-up anymore if she couldn't be as relatable to audiences as she was before the talk show? After all, the long-running program has afforded her

a great deal of fame, much of it her own doing.

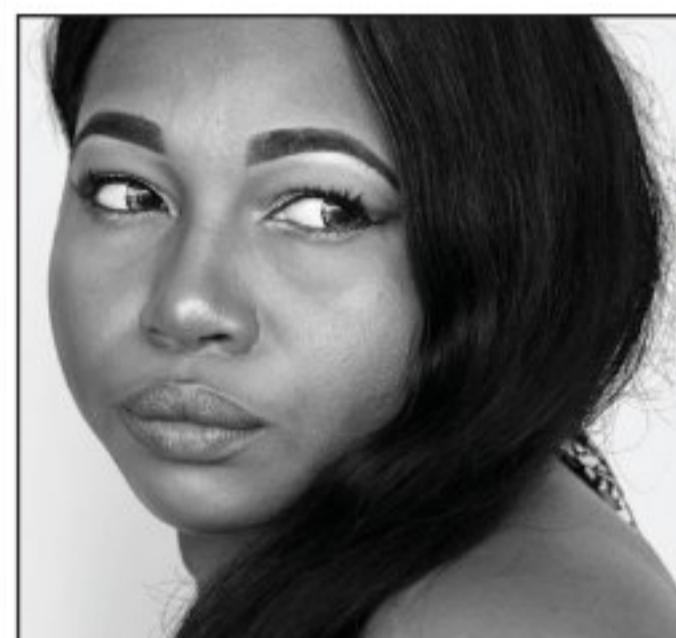
"A few years ago, I started ending my show by saying 'be kind to one another,'" she says toward the beginning of the special. "It's a wonderful thing, it is, but here's the downside. I can never do anything unkind ever now. Ever. I'm the 'be kind' girl. And I'm kind. I'm a good person. I know I am, but I'm a human being and I have bad days. I'm in traffic like you. I drive. But I can't do the things you do because I'm the 'be kind' girl."

Of course, like most comedians, DeGeneres is simply drawing from her own life experiences in order to set up a series of jokes for her audience's amusement. She does this here, in this moment, while talking about being labeled for her "be kind" statement, and she does it at the very beginning when she jokes about whether or not she's still relatable.

Yet that doesn't negate the truth behind these claims, funny and otherwise. For as her New York Times profile revealed, DeGeneres almost turned down the chance to extend her contract to 2020. That is to say, her daytime talk show almost came to an end before the profile, "Relatable," or anything relating to it was ever made public. When viewers tune in this afternoon to check out the latest episode of "Ellen," however, DeGeneres, her producer Andy Lassner and the screaming audience members will still be there. Positive social media stories will still be highlighted, checks and gifts will still be distributed, and celebrity guests will still be scared. The talk show is here to stay, for now, and the new special is here to give DeGeneres another outlet.



Ellen DeGeneres' new special is now on Netflix. NETFLIX



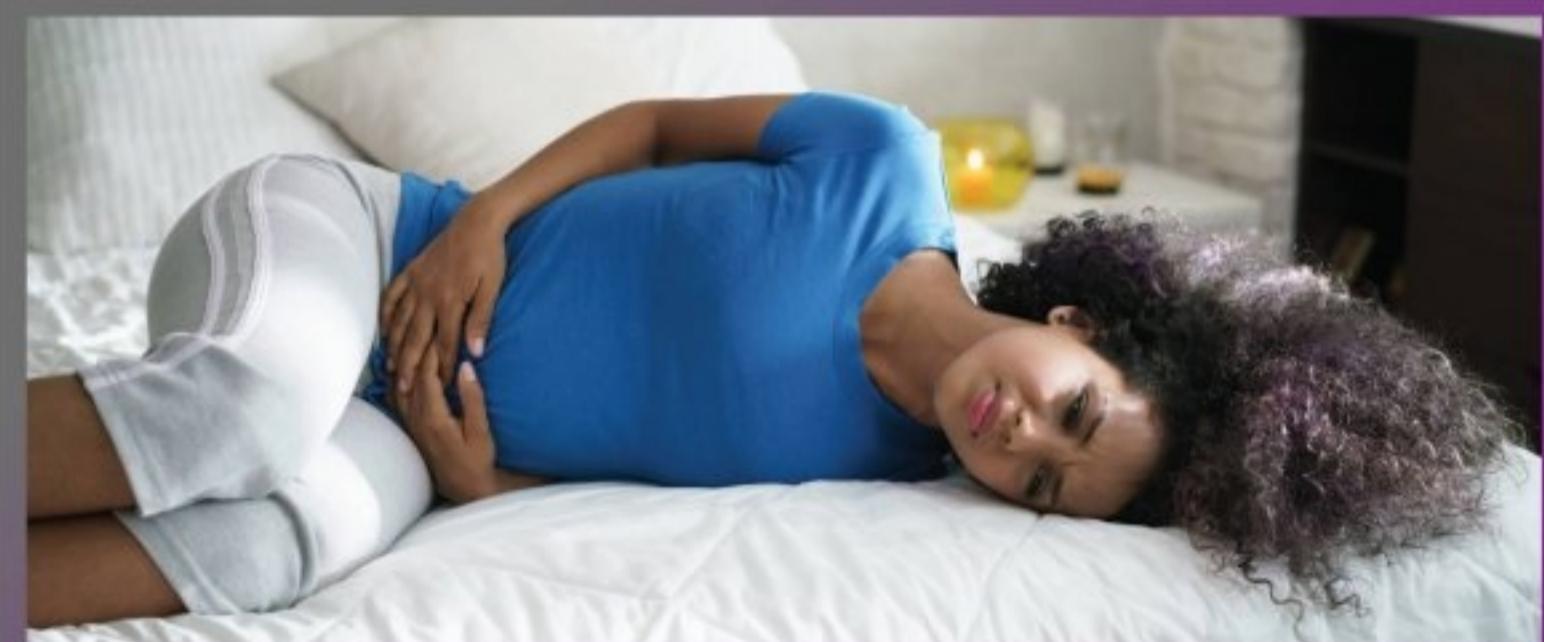
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JIMMY TOSCANO
sports@metro.us

When the Patriots go through their annual early-season struggles, the most loyal of fans are quick to say something along the lines of, "Talk to us in Decembah, dood!"

History would show that the Patriots play better as the season progresses, and cruise through December on their way to the playoffs.

But history is not repeating itself this year as the Patriots have their first two-game losing streak in December since 2002 — Brady's only missed post-season (min. two starts).

The back-to-back losses have knocked the Pats down to the No. 3 position in the playoff standings, meaning if the playoffs started today, the Pats would host the Ravens in a Wild Card Game.

For the record, the Patriots have never reached the Super Bowl under Bill Belichick without a first-round bye.

All of that leads us to one question: What is going on with the Patriots?

Depending on whom you talk to, it's either just an unusual blip on the radar, or the beginning of the end for Tom Brady, Bill Belichick and the Patriots' historic run.

Alongside a pathetic-looking run defense, it was the offense in Pittsburgh that really looked off.

We're not debating Brady's GOAT-ness here, but he's had some uncharacteristic plays of late. The numbers were there in Miami, but him taking a sack and not knowing the time-out situation cost them points at the end of the second quarter. The following week, down four points against the Steelers, he made an unacceptable fourth-quarter red zone decision in tossing up a ball that ended up in the hands of Joe Haden, again costing the Patriots much-needed points.

Brady's unwillingness to take hits was on display in Pittsburgh, especially on the Patriots' final drive of



Tom Brady and the Pats look out of sorts this December. GETTY IMAGES

the game. We know Brady cares about longevity, but football is a contact sport and sometimes you've got to take the hit if it means a more accurate throw.

After it looked like Brady was on the same page as his receivers in Miami, Rob Gronkowski and Josh Gordon were hardly seen in Pittsburgh. Gronk finished with just two receptions for 21 yards and Gordon one for 19 yards on just two targets. Gordon wasn't even on the field during the final pass

play of the game. If he's one of your best receivers, how does he not see more balls his way?

And what about the running game, or lack thereof? What once was a position led by James White is now a committee of White, Sony Michel and Rex Burkhead. The problem? Production has been limited from all three. Burkhead turned in a couple nice second-half runs in Pittsburgh, and perhaps the Patriots will look to him more in

ground-and-pound situations. The decrease in play for James White is obvious, and perhaps the Pats need to get back to him more. According to WEEI's Ryan Hannable, White averages 13 touches and 91.8 total yards in wins, but 7.4 touches and 45.2 total yards in losses. He had just seven touches (five receptions, two runs) in Pittsburgh.

We can't go over the Patriots' offensive issues without touching upon all the penalties. They committed a whopping 14 penalties for 106 yards — an uncharacteristic amount for a usually disciplined team — and a good chunk of them were on the offense. The offensive line was called for numerous penalties, including four penalties on the last two drives of the game.

Oftentimes it's the hottest team going into the playoffs that goes the furthest. If that's the case, then the Patriots better use these final two weeks at home against the Bills and Jets to heat up.



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55-59	111.00	92.25	45.00	37.50	23.00	19.25	14.20	11.95
60-64	136.00	103.50	55.00	42.00	28.00	21.50	17.20	13.30
65-69	163.50	126.00	66.00	51.00	33.50	26.00	20.50	16.00
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No reason for Gordon Hayward concern

Hayward's slow start has some Celtics fans wondering what's wrong.

RICHARD SLATE
sports@metro.us

For whatever reason, one of the main components of a typical Boston sports fan is an irrational amount of panic about what lies around every corner. Despite countless championships for all of our local teams in recent history, dread and worry still fill our airwaves and websites.

Celtics fans are sometimes cleverly referred to as "Green-teamers," and for good reason: Unlike the other fan bases, they always see a brighter side of average squads while also constantly overrating their own players.

That's what has made this season for the Celtics (18-11) so interesting, because after the team started 10-10, there had to be a scapegoat. After some deliberation, much of the blame for the club's unexplainably poor start has fallen on Gordon Hayward.

In his ninth season in the NBA out of Butler



Gordon Hayward has experienced a difficult start to his Boston Celtics career. GETTY IMAGES

University, Hayward was an All-Star in his last season with Utah (2016-17) as he became the best player on a playoff team in the always-tough Western Conference.

It was always assumed that he would come to Boston in free agency since his old college coach Brad Stevens just so happened to be the Celtics' head coach.

Still, it was a big deal that Boston could lure a marquee free agent like Hayward when for years, this had been a place

that most NBA stars avoided.

We'll always remember his gruesome ankle injury suffered five minutes into his Celtics career, which is why you have to give him ample time to work back into shape as the solid all-around player that he used to be.

To begin the season, Stevens had Hayward in every starting lineup. When the team kept underperforming and losing to teams that it had no business losing

to, it was evident that a change had to be made.

For his career, Hayward averages 15.4 points per game, 4.2 rebounds per game, 3.4 assists per game and one steal. He also is a lifetime 44.3 percent shooter from the floor, including 36.6 percent on three-pointers.

His numbers this season are noticeably down: 10.9 points per game, 41.6 percent from the floor and 34.0 percent on three-pointers. He has been playing better

of late, though, as he appears to have embraced a sixth-man role. It also has to be noted that he is shooting better from the free-throw line (89.1 percent) and grabbing one more rebound per game.

At age 28, Hayward has not forgotten how to play basketball; he was a lottery pick (ninth overall in 2010) for a reason. Rather, he simply has been rehabbing in-season from a horrific injury, the likes of which he'd never had to go through before.

The bottom line is that on a team already filled with a star like point guard Kyrie Irving (22.7 points per game), a dependable veteran center like Al Horford (12.4 points per game) and budding franchise cornerstones like Jayson Tatum (16.7 points per game) and Jaylen Brown (11.7 points per game), Hayward does not have to carry this more-than-capable group by himself.

You can tell, too, that his teammates genuinely care about him (and know how important he is in the bigger picture) since when he nearly had a triple-double on Dec. 1 at Minnesota (30 points, nine rebounds, eight assists, two steals in 30 minutes) off the bench, they were all cheering like crazy.

Boston kicks off a four-game homestand on Wednesday (7:30 p.m., NBC Sports Boston) as the lowly Suns (6-24) come to town. Better matchups come on Friday (8 p.m., NBC Sports Boston) as they host the Bucks (19-9) and Sixers (20-11) on Christmas Day (5:30 p.m., ABC). Kemba Walker and Charlotte (14-15) are also here on Saturday night (6 p.m., NBC Sports Boston).

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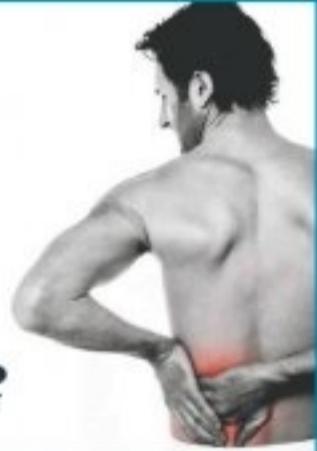
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14 Fit for a king
15 Opposite of "Giddyap!"
16 Bee colony
17 The whole kit and caboodle
19 Late bedtime
20 DVD remote button
21 Wash off soapsuds
22 Lasso's end
24 Friend
25 Grow up
27 Firstborn of several
30 Mistreat
31 Rascal
33 Presidential nickname
35 Harbor town
36 Hunger pains
37 Nylons
38 Johnny Cash's "A Boy Named ___"
39 Heroic tales

40 Disastrous defeats
41 Sleeplike state
43 Head covering
44 ___ for tat
45 Obsolete
46 Ice cream server
49 British fellow
51 Steal from
54 Pen name
56 Boyfriend
57 Gung ho
58 Hole maker
59 BPOE folks
60 Understands
61 Penniless
62 Suffix for prior or count

DOWN

1 Gout symptom
2 Swashbuckler
3 Man's accessory
4 Travolta/Newton-John musical
5 Medley of skits, songs & dances
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7 Uncovered
8 ___ as a fox
9 For ___; temporarily
10 Facial feature
11 Heavy weights

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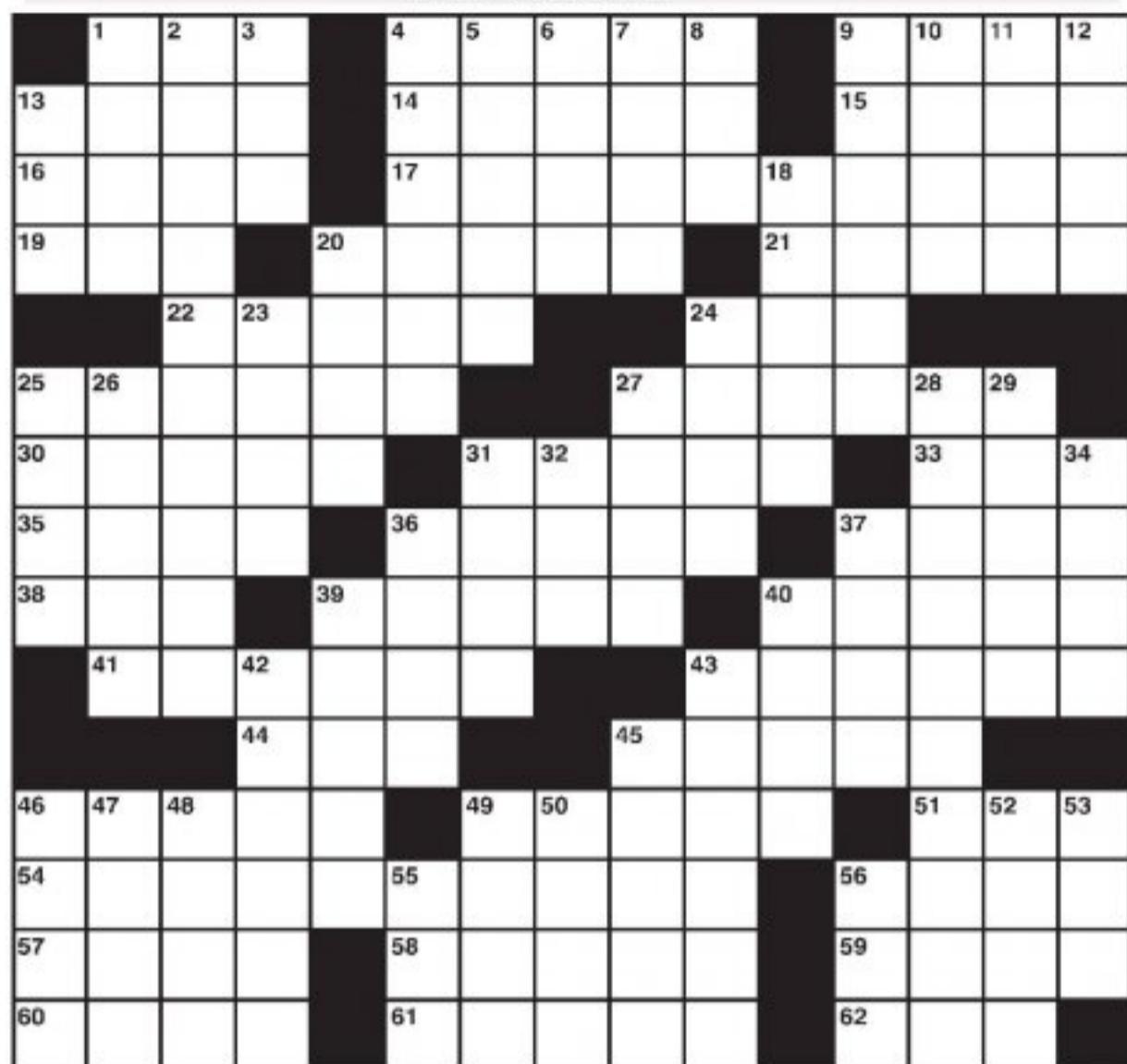
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Aries Be careful what you wish for. Offers, gifts and found money are apparent, but expect to pay a price for what you receive. Personal gain will have stipulations attached.

Taurus Concentrate on personal changes that will make you look and feel your best. If you put quality before quantity, you will be happy with the results. Romance should be a priority.

Gemini Don't let your generosity leave you short of funds. It's OK to help others, but first look out for yourself and your loved ones. Indulgent tendencies should be squelched.

Cancer You'll come up with a great gift idea for a loved one. Strive for stability and equality when it comes to important relationships. A physical improvement will fetch compliments.

Leo A change will take place if you get together with colleagues or sign up for activities that include older or younger friends or relatives. An offer or proposal looks interesting.

Virgo Pick up small items that you want to have on hand for the upcoming festivities. Make arrangements to visit older friends and relatives or include them in your plans.

Libra A change in the way you feel about someone will lead to a surprise that will bring you great joy. Travel plans or a promise you make will brighten your day.

Scorpio Update your look or pick up something that will give you the sophisticated appearance you searching for. Your uniqueness will be admired. Romance is highlighted.

Sagittarius Be reasonable when engaging in festivities or offering your services to others. It's important to put your time and effort where they will count most. Put family first.

Capricorn Make a couple of minor adjustments at home to help prepare for special events or settle in for family fun. Romance is highlighted.

Aquarius Make changes for the right reasons, not because someone else wants you to make them. Being helpful is one thing, but letting others take advantage of you is another.

Pisces A reasonable request should not be denied, but you must know where to draw the line. Someone's behavior should be pointed out if it's upsetting people you love. **EUGENIA LAST**

Yesterday's Answers



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